

Kyodan

News Letter

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AGAPE INN

as told by Y. Moribe

SHINJUKU is the busy, noisy entertainment section of Tokyo. More than 600,000 people pass through Shinjuku Station every day.

For about five years, the plaza at the east entrance to the station has been a gathering place for futen. These are Japanese young people similar to American hippies in dress and life style but not exactly the same. Many of them are junior high school graduates and some are university students who have dropped out of school. Almost all come from outside of Tokyo. They have no jobs. They come to the plaza, particularly on weekends, and sit on the railing around the plaza or walk around the streets. Until it became illegal to do so in public, many were often seen sniffing glue from plastic bags.

Gangs of ruffians are also prominent in this area, using strong-arm tactics to carry on their business and looking for young people to bring into their gangs.

There have been as many as 1,000 futen in the Shinjuku area. Now there are probably 300 real futen. But Shinjuku is the gathering place for students and many other young people as well. Its streets are lined with bars, eating places, pachinko parlors.

EVERY SUNDAY MORNING the members of our church pass the east plaza on their way to our church, a 10-minute walk away. For a long time, whenever we saw these young people, we felt very sorry for them over the lives they were leading, but helpless to do anything for them.

But at the summer church retreat three years ago, our attitudes were changed. We were studying what Christ's redemption of man means. We realized that we had been studying about the young people of Shinjuku from a sociological point of view but had never gone to them. We decided we would go back to Tokyo and find a way to approach them.

Back in Tokyo, when we began to talk about what we could do, we found that we were all afraid to talk to strangers, particularly people with the dress and mannerisms of the futen. What would we say? How would they react?



But the Bible says, "Perfect love casts out fear." If we believed this....

The first evening, seven young people went to the station area of Shinjuku. The plan was to spend about an hour talking with people and inviting them to come with us to the church's program.

I found out that night I didn't have to worry about how to start a conversation or what to say. When I had walked by futen before, the distance between us had seemed every great. But when I sat down next to a fellow, he turned and asked me if I had a match. I didn't, but that opened the conversation.

Moribe, a layman, has taken a leading role in launching and continuing Agape Inn. He is on the staff of Kurisuchan, national weekly newspaper of church and evangelism news, and drew the above sketch of Shinjuku.

The first night five persons came back alone and two returned bringing a couple of young people with them. But when we talked about what happened we found that even those who came back alone had had good conversations.

What was important was this: it wasn't that the young people were indifferent toward Christianity: it was that the church had never approached them.

We didn't use words like dendo shukai (evangelism meeting), for this is the vocabulary of people in the church. "Agape Inn" was the name we chose. We meet in rooms in the church's weekday nursery school.

Our program is informal. Each person introduces himself, often using his or her futen name. One of us gives a 30-minute talk from the Bible, speaking so the message can be easily understood and touches our daily lives. Then we divide into several small counselling groups to talk together and pray.

After the first year one of our workers who plays the guitar began to lead us in folk gospel songs, and music has become an important part of our program.

Agape Inn is now in its third year. During one year, each worker talks to as many as 300 persons so we reach several thousand in a year. About 200 have come to Agape Inn. Out of every ten we talk to, an average of three cut us off, but the others are willing and glad to talk with us. Many once had some contact with the church through kindergarten or school or friends. Others have never heard about Christ or the Bible.

So far no one has been baptized at our church as a result of the Agape Inn program. But we still feel what we are doing is worthwhile.

ONE NIGHT when I talked about sin, a young man started to cry. "Listen to me for a minute," he said. Then he explained that he had done something very bad--attacking another futen with a knife and taking his money.

Three days later the young man, who called himself Arbo, was arrested and jailed by the police on charges brought by the man he had attacked. When word of his arrest came we went to see him.

Actually there was a good and a bad side to his being picked up. We felt sorry for him

in jail, but, like many futen, he sniffed glue, a habit that's very hard to stop. In jail he was cut off from it. If a person goes for three days without it he goes through a period of severe agony but afterwards feels much better.

Arbo had been in jail about six days when we went to see him. Usually people are not allowed to talk to prisoners for more than five or ten minutes but the police let us stay as long as 30 minutes. They really wanted our help for they have their hands full with futen. They pick them up, let them go when they need the space, but know they'll be picking them up again.

Arbo's trial came up in three months. The police had notified his parents in a northern city. The father, who had been sending his son ¥50,000 a month for school, was shocked to find his son had not been in school all year. The parents came to Tokyo to visit Arbo. As we talked with them, we realized that we could make a Christian witness in court and many other places. The father felt he could not face life now without faith in God and has been attending church since returning home.

Arbo received a suspended sentence of two years with an initial one-year probationary period. He decided to go to his parents' home.

JUST BEFORE ARBO left Tokyo, a strange thing happened. He had harbored deep hatred for the man who reported him to the police. On his way to the station, Arbo came face to face with the man he had attacked and hated. But he found himself saying "Gomen" (I'm sorry), and he heard the other man reply, "I'm sorry too. What I did to you was very bad." The two talked and parted friends.

For the first time Arbo experienced what it means to forgive and be forgiven.

Arbo went back to his home town and to a church we introduced him to there. And after that we heard nothing.

I never have too high expectations. I know that these people are very human and that many of them are not strong when it comes to resisting the temptation to return to their old way of life.

(Part II will appear in the March issue)

S T A T I S T I C S
The United Church of Christ in Japan

	1971*	1970**
Number of churches	1,646	1,643
Established congregations	1,339	1,335
Preaching points	307	308
Number of members	200,800	204,842
Active resident members	100,197	102,287
Active non-resident members	31,109	32,038
Average Sunday worship attendance	46,112	47,543
Baptisms during the previous 12 months	3,222	3,012
Adults	2,860	2,688
Children	362	344
Number of active ministers	1,958	2,017
Ordained	1,590	1,607
Serving in churches	1,414	1,432
Serving in other assignments	176	175
Licensed preachers	368	410
Church schools	1,466	1,527
Students	105,086	110,443
Average attendance	71,740	73,896
Offerings (millions of yen)	1,773	1,589

* 4/71-3/72

** 4/70-3/71

QUESTION: When is bad news good news?

ANSWER: When within the bad news can be discerned encouraging new trends.

The statistics for the fiscal year 1971 were recently released. While the downward trend of the last several years continued in church membership (-2%) and in church school attendance (-2.9%), there was an upward trend in the number of adult baptisms (+7.2%) and a slight increase in the number of Bible study and special evangelistic meetings (+0.5%).

These positive factors are even more marked if one looks at the church at large, outside of the two major metropolitan areas, Tokyo and Osaka, where unrest has prevailed for the past four years in the churches and districts. For instance, while the number of baptisms in Osaka and Tokyo districts (1,056) was about the same as last year, in the other 14 districts there was an overall increase of 11.5% over the previous year. Likewise while the number of Bible study and special evangelistic meetings in the Tokyo and Osaka districts was down 1.4%, the figure was up 8.0% for the rest of the country.

The Tokyo and Osaka districts also have a negative effect on the totals in another way. Whereas in 1970, totals were based on reports for 1,557 out of 1,643 churches, for 1971 the statistics are based on 1,524 out of a total of 1,646 churches. This is due to the fact that churches which do not send in reports for three years are not represented on the statistical breakdowns--e.g., members etc.--although they do continue to appear in the total number of churches. Most of the 122 non-reporting churches are in these metropolitan areas, which have been affected most by the turmoil within the Kyodan; many of them are quite active although they have not reported for four years.

Perhaps most remarkable is the fact that, in spite of an apparent decline in total membership, church giving has continually increased. The ¥1,773 million (\$5,910,000) given by church members last year was 11.5% above the previous year. This compares favorably with the annual rate of inflation (7.7%) and the annual increase in per capita income (10.0%). An even more marked increase of 12.8% appears in the amounts of money used for evangelistic outreach.

what has been --- IN THE KYODAN --- what is to be

I. Coming Events

Kyodan-related missionary conference to meet March 27-29

II. Recent Events

Districts

Hokkai holds retreat for 252 pastors and lay persons on "Living Together"; 70% of churches participate (Shimpo 2/3)

Okinawa mission comm. conducts conference for laity and pastors on "the church officer--is he responsible or just helper?" (Shimpo 2/17)

Education

Okinawa Christian Junior College fund reaches ¥5 million toward ¥16.5 million goal

Kyodan

General Assembly Preparation Comm. elects Ichiro Kojima chairman, Hajime Sakurai secretary (Shimpo 2/10)

Laymen

National Laymen's Exec. Comm. reelects Tamotsu Hasegawa chairman, pledges support for Kyodan Confession of Faith and evangelical strain(Shimpo 2/3)

Overseas

Returnees report on Bangkok WCC Salvation Today meeting(Shimbun,Shimpo 1/27)

Japan-North America Commission on Cooperation in Mission is inaugurated, Hanabusa elected a vice chairman (Shimbun, Shimpo 2/10)

Research Institute

Research Comm. elects Yasuji Ichikawa new chairman (Shimpo 2/10)

Social

NCC Service Div. sends \$1,000 for Nicaragua earthquake victims(Shimbun 1/13)

Christians emphasize freedom of religion on Feb. 11 National Foundation Day (Shimbun, Shimpo 2/17)

Statistics

1971 figures show increase in number of baptisms and churches, decrease in membership and pastors (Shimpo 1/27, News Letter 2/20)

Women

8th Central Comm. meets 1/29-31 to prepare for 1973-74 (Shimpo 2/7)

NEWS BRIEF

The new TOMIZAKA SEMINAR HOUSE was dedicated in January--a joint action project of the German Churches (Landeskirchen) and the Kyodan through the agency of the German East Asia Mission. This is the first project to be sponsored in Japan by the Southwest German Churches World Mission Board, located in Stuttgart. Rev. Paul Schneiss, executive secretary of this Board and a former missionary to Japan, attended the dedication.

The new four-story Seminar House, erected near Korakuen in Tokyo at a cost of ¥45 million, contains large and small meeting rooms and dining and overnight facilities for 50 persons. The Seminar House provides a place for short, intensive overnight seminars in which participants can continue in group and sub-group discussions until late into the night and the next day go directly to work or school. Such seminars have become popular with university students, professors and church youth groups since the Seminar House program started in 1969.

Rev. Kasuya Yoshikawa, Rev. Guenther Dressler and Yasuji Tanaka are co-directors. Prof. Jurgen Moltmann, arriving in mid-February, will be among the first overseas visiting lecturers and guests to enjoy the new facilities.